

## Love Me Just a Little by hayleyisbored

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Earth to fucking Richie, this is not the man you are looking for.

## Love Me Just a Little

Richie has slept with loads of people, plenty of times. He's had it all: the elbow to the back, the knee to the groin, the sweaty mess of tangled sheets and twisted limbs fighting for space. An interloper in his bed, a sensation of privacy being invaded. The cool dismissal in the morning which usually comes so naturally to him and the ensuing tweets of a disgruntled former-fan telling anyone who'll listen about the time they got ghosted by that two-bit comedian, Richie Tozier.

He used to wonder if something was wrong with him because the only tweet he'd ever been offended by was something to the tune of: *ya know, he's not even that funny! he's just a pathetic loser! Richie hadn't even needed to go looking for that one, the guy had had the balls to tag him outright. The irony was lost on him at the time but looking back, he might have taken some comfort from that loser remark, might have shed some hysterical tears for all the laughing he could have done.*

Richie Tozier, a reject through and through. You can take the Loser out of Derry...

Sure, he's always been a bit of a shithead but he could never figure out why he struggled to find anything more meaningful beyond a pity fuck in a strange new city after a show gone bad. The bars endlessly changed but the weight in his stomach had stayed the same, that desperate need to be liked, to be loved, settling uncomfortably amidst the swill of five or six cheap beers and a handful of peanuts. A guy in the next seat looking to get laid would make eye contact, *"hey, aren't you...?"* and it was easy peasy to drown out the loneliness after that - for a brief while, at least. Never mind, he'd say to himself, he could always try again in the next city over.

Richie was skating by, learning to take it one day at a time.

Then along came Mike's wholly unwelcome phone call, the miserable trip back to a shitty little town he'd long since forgotten, trepidation as he strolled into the restaurant in Derry and found Edward Kaspbrak there, looking as insecure in his polo shirt and wedding

band as Richie feels beneath all of his trashy jokes. Trashmouth by name but not inherently by nature.

And just like that, it was as if Richie's soul crash-landed back into his body, the mere sight of his anxious best-friend-cum-childhood-crush striking him down like emotional lightning. He's a real boy again. He started feeling things he hadn't felt in decades, positive things, and with it came the epiphany that maybe he'd somehow shut down a part of himself when he slowly forgot about everything that had mattered to him. Maybe he'd lost his heart as well as his memories because it still belonged to someone he hadn't been able to remember.

All those years of kissing strangers, digging fingernails into their sweat stained shirts and sticking his tongue down their throats, wallowing in hickeys and bite marks and a whole host of positions he's far too old to attempt now, all in a bid to physically claw his way into feeling something more than temporary. It had been for nothing; he had no idea that his body was trying to communicate with him, to tell him that it was pining for Eddie even after all that time had passed.

*Earth to fucking Richie, this is not the man you are looking for.*

While Richie was sleeping his way up and down the country, Eddie had settled on the first woman he found who bore more than a striking resemblance to his long deceased mother. He'd gotten a lovely, boring job in risk assessment or assessing risks, and the most dangerous thing that had happened to him since leaving Derry was making the mistake of answering Mike's call while he was driving.

And Richie thought *he* had problems.

Eddie told Richie that he had come back into himself in Derry, regained all those heartwarming childhood memories of his possessive mother and the reasons why he left town to begin with. He said all sorts of little things about the Losers returned to him - Ben's favourite boyband, the brand of cigarettes Beverly smoked - but there was something about Richie that felt different, something he couldn't put his finger on.

It had clicked a few weeks ago but months had elapsed since they'd fought It and drifted back to their lives, each of them changed permanently. *Months* after he'd given his chest wound time to heal. Months of confusing guilt whenever he looked at Myra. Months of creeping dread when he figured out he'd made a mistake letting Richie leave when they parted ways at the airport. He'd had endless weeks to sit on that lingering hug goodbye, to replay Richie's splayed fingers against his back and hot breath against his neck, warm lips pressed to his scarred cheek.

"If you're ever in L.A., look me up." Richie had told him, sniffing back tears so that Eddie couldn't see, texting him his home address then and there to make sure he had it. One tiny step away from making Eddie show him that it had gone through because fuck if he was going to let him slip away a second time. "Seriously, don't even message me, just show up. God knows I have a fuck ton of space I don't use."

Richie had waved Eddie off through the gate, watched the top of his dark head bob and disappear into the crowd of disgruntled travellers until Richie was running late for his own flight, and it *sucked*. He'd been in danger of wanting to chase Eddie down, to declare his love on the plane to thunderous applause and tearful congratulations. Then he remembered this was real life and people didn't do those sorts of things because they'd look like a real dumbass if they got rejected in front of an uninvited audience taking videos on their cellphones.

That shit would circulate on the internet for the rest of his life: **"Watch Richie Tozier Make An Ass Out Of Himself On Late Night Flight! You Won't Believe What Happens Next!"**

However, eventually - sure enough - Eddie came. So had one pitiful suitcase full of Eddie's worldly possessions. Richie had opened his door to find Eddie standing there, nervously twisting the hem of his sweatshirt, his brown eyes too round and too bright, and he had slammed the door back shut in Eddie's face.

"What the *fuck*?" had come Eddie's muffled voice before Richie had the sense to wrench it open again. Richie yanked the suitcase out of Eddie's hand before he could say another word and tossed it behind

him in what he hoped was at least the near vicinity of his apartment, then bundled Eddie into his arms because that look on his friend's face was enough to tell him it wasn't a social visit.

Once the initial shock had worn off, Eddie had hooked his arms around Richie's back and pulled him close like Pennywise was on his tail. He clung to him like they were still little kids recovering from a traumatic ordeal. Maybe they were, in a way.

"I shouldn't have gone back. I should have stayed with you."

And Richie - needy, in way over his head, selfish bastard that he was - had been elated.

"So stay with me, Spaghetti Head."

Eddie stayed.

Now, sleeping with someone is nice. Sleeping with *Eddie* specifically is nice.

"*Nuh-uh, not that way*", Richie mentally slaps himself away from that line of thought, "*Get your goddamn mind out of the gutter, Tozier.*"

Although *that* was nice, too, when it had happened. Eddie had clumsily reached out for Richie one evening, who hadn't the immediate presence of mind to realise that Eddie was in fact trying to unbutton his shirt and not, say, criticise Richie's sense of style in his own unique way. Eddie steered them both down a path he'd never ventured before with growing intent and Richie enthusiastically caught on soon enough when Eddie's hands hit his belt buckle in an unmistakable gesture. They'd literally tripped over each others feet as they staggered to Richie's bedroom, kissing through snorts and laughing between breaths, leaving behind a breadcrumb trail of clothes peppered with the most loving of insults.

"What the fuck did you think I was doing, Rich?!"

"I don't know! Maybe I thought you were trying to burn my favourite shirt? It wouldn't be the first time!"

"I already told you that was an accident, you dick!"

"Oh my god, fine! Just shut up and kiss me, idiot."

Eddie had shown Richie the bruises on his legs the next day, ranting all about his delicate skin as he pointed to splotches of blue and green over his knobbly knees, and Richie was stunned to find out that he had never loved anyone more.

God. That had been really, really nice. For all of that nicety, Richie is in danger of shocking himself by admitting he'd pick *this* over *that* if he ever wandered into some hellscape scenario where he'd even have to choose.

This, *right now*; Richie stares down at Eddie's peaceful face, sleep turning his features slack in ways he can never manage in waking hours because the poor sap is strung tighter than a fucking bow on his best days.

Sex is great. It's fun. It's fucking stupendous. Yet Richie has had enough loveless sex to realise it's nothing without the bit that comes afterwards, the part he'd been aching to find because he'd grown tired of having to live with only himself for company.

Eddie softly snoring beside him, head nestled in the crook of his elbow, taking up way more room than should be humanly possible; it no longer makes Richie want to hightail it out of the bed, or sit up and wait for the first grey light of morning to come through the window the way he had when it was somebody else lying there.

The loneliness which Richie had known since he'd left Derry dissipated the minute Eddie fell onto his mattress, kicking his way out of his jeans in a frenzy, blushing hard even in the dark but answering the silent question in Richie's eyes with unshakeable resolve.

"*I want this*," he'd said as his trembling fingers unfastened that freaking wrist watch he's never been without, "*I want this with you*."

Richie had wanted to climb on top of Eddie and hide him away from his room, the city beyond his blinds, the world. He wanted to strip off all his own clothes and pull the blankets up over their heads, press himself into every bit of Eddie's personal space. He wanted to protect

Eddie and all the precious things about him. He'd never needed to be as close as possible to anyone as he did with Eddie and finally - *finally* - he found out what it was like to want someone as much as they wanted him.

He feels so full of love that it might come spilling out of his mouth at any moment.

"What are you doing to my face, you fucking weirdo?" Eddie mumbles all of a sudden from his side of the bed, slurring his way past the edge of sleep.

Richie pulls back his fingers from Eddie's brow, pretends to be flicking away some non-existent bit of fluff from his thumb. "Uh - nothing?"

Eddie blinks awake, blearily checks his watch on the bedside table and groans.

"It's four in the morning, why the fuck are you up?"

So Richie might be a horrible sleeper between the routine of his inconsistent working days (technically nights) and the leftover trauma from seeing his dear old pal Pennywise again. He'd packed it all up nicely in Tupperware, brought it along with him from Derry. There's only so much you can tell your therapist when a murderous shapeshifting alien is involved so he tends to skip the details.

"Just thinking."

"Great. It's good to know your brain has finally kick-started itself after all this time," Eddie sighs, pressing the heels of his hands into his eye sockets. "Just so you know, I'm about to do some thinking of my own."

"Oh yeah? What about, jackass?"

"I'm *thinking* about how I'm gonna start sleeping on the couch if this turns out to be the beginning of a regular occurrence."

"You wouldn't dare." Richie prods Eddie's armpit, makes him jump and wriggle away. "You haven't asked me what I've been thinking

about."

Eddie grunts out a noise of frustration, a low guttural sound that does all sorts of wondrous things to Richie's insides.

"Okay. What were you thinking about, Richard? Tell me all about those terrifying things that bounce around in that thick skull of yours." he says as he sits up onto his elbows, the blankets falling about his waist to expose his bare chest, that ugly scar left from Pennywise's spikes.

Richie *hates* that Eddie was the one who had to go through that. It should have been Richie, who most definitely deserved it because he'd goaded that fucking clown after the terror had pushed him over the edge - or at the very least Bill, who would have stared Pennywise down even as he was getting skewered. Not Eddie though - Eddie, who used to be scared of his own shadow and convinced himself everyday that he had any multitude of obscure diseases.

When he notices the object of Richie's attention, Eddie ducks down and searches for the discarded t-shirt that Richie had wrestled off of him hours earlier, for once not mentioning even a single one of Richie's supposed millions of germs. The scar is still a sore spot for Eddie but it bothers him far less than the pink slither left on his cheek from Henry Bowers' knife. That one is harder to cover up.

"Only how much I love you, loverboy." Richie tells him, watching Eddie yank his shirt over his head. "Love of my life. Sweetcheeks. Baby."

Eddie's head reemerges, bringing with it a wave of heavy disapproval. "Jesus."

Richie still can't believe that *he's* the sentimental one in the relationship. Eddie rarely indulges in soppy declarations so it's up to him, fucking Richard Tozier, to smother Eddie in enough compliments until his ears turn pink with secret pleasure. They both enjoy it more than either let on - and Richie enjoys it *a lot*.

"When was the last time you felt like this?"



"Felt like what?" Eddie snips, flopping back against the headboard. "Grouchy because the asshole next to me won't quit groping my face while I sleep?"

"Like a whole fucking person again, dipshit."

Eddie doesn't make any quips about the inconvenience of Richie's deep philosophical thinking in the early hours of the morning. Instead, he opens his mouth and shuts it again just as quickly. Eddie turns his head away for a moment, takes his time to think over Richie's words, looks back and meets Richie's gaze with acute but disturbed understanding.

"Not in a long while," Eddie confesses, hands wringing in his lap. "Not since we were kids."

"Not even with Myra?"

Eddie shoots Richie a pained look. "No, Richie. Not even with my ex-wife."

"It's fucking bizarre, right?" Richie says, relieved beyond belief that not only is Eddie playing ball but he actually gets it. "I didn't know I was capable of feeling this much."

"I don't think any of us thought you capable of genuine human emotion, Richie."

"Nice," Richie jokes, leaning over Eddie. "I'm trying to tell you how much I'm overwhelmed with love for you, and you go and say a thing like that."

"What do you want from me, Richie? I was dead to the world all of five minutes ago until you woke me up."

Violent images flit through Richie's head like some sick horror flick: Eddie coughing up blood, pure disbelief on his pale face at the gaping wound in his chest that hadn't been there a second ago, red all over Richie's arms...

"...do you *have* to say it that way?"

“Sorry.”

“It’s okay. You can make it up to me by saying it back.”

Eddie feigns ignorance, “Say what, exactly?”

“You know what,” Richie teases. “It starts with an L and then there’s an O - ”

“You want me to call you a Loser?”

“Forget it. I shouldn’t push it.”

Richie doesn’t understand when his joking turned serious. It’s like he’s a teenager again; so much of his time had been spent staring at Eddie from across the room, of willing him to lift his eyes from his textbook for once and just *look* at him. He’d put all of his energy into earning any of Eddie’s looks of amusement and disgust, so long as he was paying attention to him.

Eddie loves him, it’s as sure as the sight of him frowning right now, and Richie needs to learn how to not be that same kid yanking Eddie along by the hand into the photo booth with him. Eddie can only give exactly what he’s prepared to, the way he always has.

Richie can go too far when it comes to Eddie, he knows this. Beep beep, you’ve said too much.

Richie starts kicking the covers off himself, scoops up his glasses from the bedside table. Now there’s Eddie’s frowning face in crisp HD, what a treat.

“Look, I’ll let you sleep. I’ll go sit in the living room -”

One hand plants itself on his shoulder.

“Wait.”

“What? I’m totally cool taking the couch, man, I’m not gonna make you -”

“Alright, okay.” Eddie breathes calmly, and then, suddenly, he shoves

Richie onto his back with surprising strength. One pyjama-clad leg comes up and over so that he's straddling Richie, pinning him down and holding him still. "Listen up, you big fucking idiot because I'll only say this like, once every 10 years. I love you. *I love you.* I love you so much that it stresses me out sometimes, okay? What the fuck would I even do if anything ever happened to you? It makes me sick with worry."

Richie shouldn't be as touched as he is, "Nothing is gonna happen to me, Eds."

"I love you so much that I can't believe I thought I felt anything even remotely close to this when I was with Myra. She was - Myra was familiar. I thought love was supposed to be someone who told you what to do: what to wear, when to eat, where to go. She was familiar and I thought that was what it was meant to be like."

Fuck. He could cry for Eddie. For poor Eddie Spaghetti out in the big bad world, turning to the closest source of comfort he could find, which was not much at all.

Richie grips onto Eddie's neck, his voice soft against the darkness, "What is love then, Eduardo?"

"Thanks to some cruel joke courtesy of the universe, it's you. It's this. Us." Eddie gestures between them, to the unnameable thing which has miraculously sprouted in both of them through staggered years. "It's wanting to spend my day - my night - my entire fucking life with a Loser like you. It's apparently finding someone who ignores 95% of the stuff I say and does the exact opposite. It's dealing with a person who uses goddamn *hand soap* when I tell them to wash the dishes with something more than a splash of water. It's finding the things you say funny even though it makes me want to throw up in my mouth a little. Love is a pain in my ass but I want it anyway."

"Wow. Eddie," Richie says, holding down a smile. "I think that's the nicest thing you've ever said to me."

"Fuck off, Richie. Don't act like you're not fucking *living* for me saying any of that." Eddie is embarrassed but he lets Richie pull his face down, lets him press kisses along his throat to his chin.

“Oh, I’m most definitely going to tell the group chat about this.” Richie whispers gleefully into Eddie’s jaw. “Bev is going to flip her shit.”

“Please do *not* do that. Bill will be insufferably happy and he’s going to make a whole thing out of it, we’ll probably get flowers in the mail -”

“That’s the plan.”

“Jesus Christ. I hate you.”

“Uh, I seem to recall you telling me that you loved me a minute ago. No take backs.”

“*No take backs?* Are you actually thirteen?”

“God, I hope not. Once was bad enough.”

Eddie tips his head, rests his forehead against Richie’s. It’d be romantic if it didn’t dislodge Richie’s glasses.

“It wasn’t all bad though, was it Richie?”

Richie shuts his eyes, thinks of the adrenaline and euphoria he felt as he plummeted down into warm water. He thinks of secret clubhouses and sticky fingers from melted ice creams, of bruised shins from bike pedals and his arm slung around Eddie’s shoulders. He thinks of the summers running around town with the rest of the Loser’s Club, when they had the chance to just be kids.

When they were together, all was right in the world.

“Nah,” Richie smiles, grabbing for Eddie’s hand, lacing their fingers together. “Sometimes it wasn’t half bad at all.”